

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Toshio Serizawa

Toshio Serizawa was born May 26, 1916 in Kona Hawai'i. He was educated at the University of Hawai'i.

Serizawa began working at Hawaiian Airlines, Inc. in 1955. During his long tenure with the airlines he worked as a sales representative and later as the district manager.

Serizawa served two terms on the Kaua'i County Board of Supervisors, and was a delegate to the 1950 constitutional convention. He served in the territorial and state legislatures as a Democrat. He retired in 1970.

Tape No. 17-24-1-89

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Toshio Serizawa (TS)

October 4, 1989

Hilo, Hawai'i

BY: Larry Meacham (LM) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following is an interview with Toshio Serizawa. It took place on October 4, 1989, at the Naniloa Hotel in Hilo, Hawai'i. Interviewers were Dan Tuttle and Larry Meacham. This is videotape number one.

LM: Okay, Mr. Serizawa, where were you born and when?

TS: I was born in Kona. It's a long time ago. May 26, 1916.

LM: Okay, what did your father [Hideyuki] and mother (Nao Uematsu Serizawa) do?

TS: They're both immigrants from Japan. Now as to the exact arrival time, I'm vague. I have no idea. But it was quite some time ago.

LM: And what did they do when they came here?

TS: They were schoolteachers. And I believe, in their case, the Japanese government had sent them over as teachers to teach the offsprings of the immigrants that came on contract.

LM: And what was their background? Father and mother's family background?

TS: As far as I know, on my maternal side, my grandfather was not much of a worker. He just owned land and he just leased or rented the land out to tenant farmers. On my paternal side, they were just academicians.

LM: Okay. So you grew up—I believe you started in Kona, but you basically grew up in Hilo, yeah?

TS: I would say basically it depends on what period of my growth was spent where. My family moved to Honolulu (from Hilo) when I was eleven. So the most important period of my life was in Honolulu.

LM: And where did you graduate from high school?

TS: Good old McKinley High School. (Chuckles)

LM: Okay, and what year was that?

TS: Nineteen thirty-five.

LM: Okay, were you involved in student politics, at all, at McKinley?

TS: Absolutely never at all.

LM: Okay, and . . .

DT: But before we leave McKinley, let's not pass over McKinley too fast, not that you were. But was Miles Cary there at the time?

TS: He was principal. He was a tough guy, too. Real tough principal.

DT: He's reputed to have been one of those educators who had perhaps the most profound influence on education in Hawai'i in modern times.

TS: But yes, he did. He did. Well, you understand now, when Miles Cary was principal, some of the outstanding students in McKinley were people like Francis Ching, Bert Kobayashi. Those are the fellows that Miles Cary really, yeah, brought along.

DT: (Tape inaudible) Hiram Fong . . .

TS: Well, he was before my time so I couldn't say very much about him, but I remember Francis because I was a sophomore, I guess, when he was a senior. He was student body president. Great orator, school debate team.

LM: So there was a lot of that sort of democracy and politics and stuff in the school in general?

TS: Well, I must confess that during that period of my life I was completely unaware of politics per se and had a totally passive attitude towards it. Whether it's high school politics or government politics.

LM: But you did---how about your attitude toward democracy in general? I mean, was, supposedly the school was teaching very equality-oriented democratic sort of ideals. I mean, did you feel you picked that up there?

TS: No, I did not. No.

DT: Not even in civic class? I think they used to call it civics.

TS: Yes, we had civics, yes. But, it changed during that period that I was in high school. It changed to core studies.

DT: Oh, I see. So more of that experimentation in your education.

TS: Yeah, we were the victims of the experiment at the time.

DT: What were you interested in then, at that stage?

TS: Girls.

(Laughter)

DT: Gee, this tape takes on an extraordinary flavor, doesn't it?

LM: We promised him we wouldn't ask about other things.

DT: Next question to you, Larry?

LM: All right, then you went to UH [University of Hawai'i]. Did you major in girls there, too?

(Laughter)

TS: No. I majored in agriculture. Well, you know, a guy has to grow up sooner or later. And I think by that time I reached a period where I had grown somewhat. But still, not interested in politics.

LM: Why agriculture? What did you plan to do?

TS: Well, the reason I got interested in agriculture is because when I was a child growing up in Hilo, in grammar school, there was this little garden in the back of the school, and we planted cabbages, peanuts. And harvesting these vegetables was such a rewarding experience, I said to myself, "I'm going to be a farmer." But I wanted to be a smart farmer, so I decided, well, I better major in agriculture. Of course, I'm not too sure whether I became a smart farmer or not.

DT: Was [Yasuo] Baron Goto there at the time?

TS: Baron was then with the [UH Agricultural] Extension Service, yes.

DT: Who else do you remember at UH that may have had a . . .

TS: H. H. [Howry Haskell] Warner, who was then the director of the extension service. Dr. [Harold] St. John.

DT: Oh, yes.

TS: He's a great guy. He was a great teacher. Who was my chemistry teacher?

DT: The Bilgers there at the time?

TS: That Dean [Earl M.] Bilger, he was the toughest. (DT laughs.) Oh, he was tough.

DT: Not to mention his wife [Lenore Bilger].

TS: Mrs. Bilger was even tougher.

DT: (Laughs) Okay. You said it.

TS: Great teachers. Great teachers, but they were tough. The best one of all was the dean of men, Dean [Ernest C.] Webster. I don't think either one of you are familiar with that name, but he was a great guy.

DT: Familiar with, I never met him but. . . . Mm hmm.

TS: He was a great man. With a pipe in his hand all the time and . . .

LM: These are all building names to me.

(Laughter)

TS: That's right, the buildings are named after these men.

LM: St. John Hall, Bilger Hall, et cetera.

DT: Bachman was there too, I think.

TS: That's right.

DT: Probably had your basic---you had the 150 Government course probably from Paul Bachman.

TS: Yeah. Then we had Gregg Sinclair.

DT: Right.

TS: He was my English (literature) teacher.

DT: English teacher, okay.

LM: Amazing. Okay, so did you finish at UH?

TS: No, I didn't. I decided I had enough. I wanted to go into farming. So I quit and went to farming. After I farmed for a year, I decided that I better get back to school. In the meantime, a friend of mine decided that he wanted to go into business, needed a business partner. So I said, "Okay, I'll go in with you on the business." Got a deal and then (I figured) after I got enough of it, I'll go back to finish up school. But then things happened, as you know. You get married [to Elsie Nitta], and then education gets farther and farther away. So I never really did finish.

DT: Okay, so what sort of business did you and your friend get into?

TS: Agricultural farm supplies. [TS and his business partner started the Growers' Service in 1942.]

DT: Okay, and where was this?

TS: This was in Honolulu. These were the days when River Street was the center of vegetable produce wholesaling. And we were located on River Street.

LM: Okay, and you continued this up to the war or what?

TS: Yes, yes.

LM: And then . . .

TS: And then we got into---then our business veered very sharply in the direction of supplying the navy with fresh vegetables. By this time, I was on Kaua'i. We (had) opened up (a branch of) the business on Kaua'i.

LM: How did your father and mother feel when the war broke out?

TS: Well, I tell you, that evening of December 7, [1941], was one scary evening. It was a Sunday, as I recall it. And Sunday morning, my brother, younger brother, who was then in the 100th Infantry [Battalion], and located in Schofield Barracks, but he was home on weekend leave. Sunday morning, about 7:30 or so, [we] began to hear this popping. I lived in Kalihi, by the way, so it's very close to Pearl Harbor. And that continuous popping aroused my curiosity. I got out of bed, and I went out and looked around in the direction from which the sound was coming. And there's all this black puffs of smoke in the air. But I've seen this thing happen before, but whenever we saw it in the past, the smoke was white. This time it was black. And then, chee, all of a sudden you see this airplane going overhead. By then the radio was on and said, "We're being attacked." So they said all military personnel report back (to quarters). So I decided to (drive) my brother back to Schofield Barracks.

DT: It was probably Webley Edwards on the air, wasn't it?

TS: Yes, it was . . .

DT: Later one of your colleagues in the house [of representatives], right?

TS: Yes, Web was on the air at that time, you know.

LM: So being Japanese-language teachers, did your folks come under more scrutiny and so forth?

TS: Well, I'll tell you again, it was a horrible day and night. You cannot imagine the kind of traumatic experience we went through that evening. I was Japanese by genetics, and American by birth. War between Japan and United States, where was I going to be? You know, we had no way of really understanding the situation (that) we were (in) at the time. Then, the radio said no lights permitted. We had to stay in total darkness the night of the seventh. And about eight P.M. or so, two men walked into my house. Both of 'em were in uniforms, military uniforms. One of them was a classmate of mine. Kanazawa, he was a lieutenant at the time. And he was with another officer and they came in and said. . . . And it wasn't Kinji Kana--- Kinji I guess, was . . .

DT: Twins right, weren't they?

TS: Yeah, they're twins.

DT: Twins, yeah, yeah.

TS: Kanemi or Kinji, I forget what, which one. I think it was Kanemi. He said, "You know, Toshi, we have to take your father with us."

"What for?"

"Well, we want to ask questions."

So, you know, in a typical first-generation Japanese [fashion], he was already in his *kimono*, you know, to go to bed. And so I said, "Well, sure, what for?" you know.

He said, "Well, we need to question him."

And, you know, they were almost going to take him away without giving him time to change his clothes. I got really upset. And here's a guy that I've known for (seven) or (eight) years in school, telling me that he's taking my father away for no apparent reason at all. But it was a war condition. We learned that very quickly on the radio. So finally, I asked him to at least (have) the decency (and) give my father (time) to get dressed. And he did in (his) typical fashion. He put on his necktie, and the coat and everything, put his shoes on and went out. That's the last time I saw him until 1944.

DT: Really?

LM: So what happened to him?

TS: He was interned on the Mainland. He was gone a long time.

LM: Where on the Mainland was he?

TS: I don't know exactly where he was because we used to get censored letters—my mother did, from time to time, with different postmarks.

DT: This was in Honolulu, too?

TS: Yes, he was . . .

DT: It wasn't over here [Hilo], he was there [Honolulu].

TS: He was interned in---yes, it was in Honolulu. Yes, we were in Honolulu, so he was interned, I believe, in Sand Island. I tried to get to see him, but they wouldn't allow it.

DT: And then they transferred him to the Mainland?

TS: Yeah, yes.

DT: Was this the same sort of thing that happened to [Thomas T.] Sakakihara, who was a

Republican politician in the legislature?

TS: Yes, I remember Sakakihara.

DT: Remember he was apparently interned from Hawai'i?

TS: But, he was interned in Hawai'i, but he did not get transferred to the Mainland.

DT: He didn't get sent to the Mainland, I see.

TS: He always remained in Hawai'i.

LM: But didn't military intelligence visit your house again?

TS: Not to my knowledge.

LM: In the [John A.] Burns interview, they talked about they came to search the house or something?

TS: Well, they did. Yes, they did, but not while I was home. In my absence, my mother did say that they came in. They came to search the house, and apparently they found a few things. Pictures of things that they didn't feel was a proper picture to keep in the house during war conditions.

LM: Was your father ambivalent in his feelings about Japan and the U.S.? Or was he strongly pro-U.S. or what?

TS: Well, he has always said this to me, particularly in this one instance when we decided to forsake our dual citizenship. See, we were all dual citizens at the time. But just about a year before the war, we had given up our Japanese citizenship. At that time it was on his advice that we did it. And his reasons for it was basically, "You are Americans. You think like Americans. You are absolutely, completely, and totally unrelated to Japanese culture or traditions, so you should become real American citizens. But as long as you have this dual citizenship hanging over your head, you cannot be totally American." And this is what he had told us as justification for giving up our Japanese citizenship.

DT: Yet he could not be naturalized until after the war, right?

TS: Yes.

LM: In '52 [through the McCarran Act]. So during the war you basically supplied, you were working in produce supply . . .

TS: Yes.

LM: . . . in Kaua'i. Okay, so what happened after the war?

TS: Well, after the war, I met this man called John ["Jack"] Burns. Well, I didn't know Jack at all, except that my sister, who's older than I, told me that Jack took things for her to my

father who was in Sand Island, interned at the time. None of us could my father, again. But Jack took care of it, because Jack was then in the police force. So he made things possible for my sister. And for that, you know, I have always remembered Jack. But I had never met him.

But when I was on Kaua'i, mindful of the fact that these were the years of my life that I was most active, coming along with little children in the family, raising them, and getting involved in community affairs and so forth, Jack happened to come to Kaua'i. I believe it was one of these few trips he made to the neighbor islands to try to organize the Democratic party (after the war). And he came in and he didn't have too many people (to see other than) the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]. He called on the ILWU members to (help) organize the Democratic party. I didn't attend these meetings, but he stopped by our store, and we chatted because I was an independent. I wasn't connected with the ILWU in any way, shape or form.

LM: Did he look you up because of the connection with your sister? Did he just hit you at random or. . . .

TS: Just by random. And we found, you know, our discussions to be very interesting. And we talked about how, now (that) the war was over, we should develop our own community into a true democratic community.

LM: Okay, we're about to run out of tape. I want to ask you one quick thing. Did he---when you say he worked through the ILWU, the ILWU would [hold] meetings, and then Jack would give presentations to those meetings . . .

TS: Yes.

LM: . . . ask people to join the Democrats?

TS: Yes.

LM: Oh, okay. And what sort of community activities were you involved in?

TS: Well, I was in the Chamber of Commerce. But the one that I was most active in was the Jaycees. During that time, it was called the Junior Chamber of Commerce. And this is where I really spent a lot of my time in doing community service.

LM: Okay. All right, let's change the tape and then we can ask you . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is videotape number two of the Serizawa interview.

LM: Okay, so Jack Burns came to see you just randomly. What did you talk about? What did he say?

TS: Well, if you understand the background of the community in which I lived at the time, (which) was Lihu'e, Kaua'i. Those were the days that the sugar plantations controlled (our economic) and political lives. The reason, I believe, Jack Burns went to the ILWU to help

organize the Democratic party, is because here was one large (militant) cohesive group with a common interest. And it made a lot of sense that if you had to develop a political party against the overwhelming strength of the Republican party, you'd have to have a solid base. And I think Jack did the right thing because the ILWU was a solid base. And many of us who were not members or involved in the union movement at all, had many things in common with the ILWU, because we were the underdogs, in this case, in my business world. I had a small store. And, therefore, I needed the kind of strength and support that a political party could give. And this is the kind of things that Jack talked about. He talked about the social economics of Hawai'i's future.

LM: And how about---what did he say about returning veterans and things like that?

TS: Well, he said this. He said, "Toshi, we have a great opportunity because lot of your friends who have come (back) from the war, have an opportunity to go back to school at Uncle Sam's expenses [under the G.I. Bill of Rights]." And he said, "They are all going there." And he started naming names. And he says, "When these guys return, they're either going to have to start with their own business, or they open up their own office." And he says, "If we don't have a strong voice in government, all these efforts will be in vain." And he says, "Toshi, all you guys, nisei, talk about is schoolteachers, schoolteachers, that's all you guys got to be, schoolteachers." He got red in the face when he pointed a finger, he went to me like that. He was right. You go to---you check back the history of the University of Hawai'i, College of Education, 90 percent nisei students.

DT: Well, by that, he meant that was really the only profession at that time that was open to any of you.

TS: That's right.

LM: So, are you saying you should [do] other things . . .

TS: Politically, you can open up other opportunities. And this is why he said, "You are at the age group that can help do this, turn it around for your children." He's always talked about "for your children."

DT: And you were one of those in sort of an older age bracket. Little bit like Spark Matsunaga.

TS: Sparky and I are about the same age.

DT: That period.

TS: Yes.

DT: I think one thing that we should clarify, though, in those days I would imagine---although it was before my time in Hawai'i, of course, not a lot, but some---that Jack Burns was not talking to large meetings or anything of that sort, or union gatherings. This was mostly Jack Burns, one-on-one, right?

TS: One-on-one.

DT: With you in the store, with this worker here, this worker there, with Jack Hall [regional director of the ILWU] along, sometimes, with Jack. Sometimes with somebody else from the union.

LM: Would the ILWU sponsor meetings for Jack to speak?

TS: Well, he did, yeah . . .

LM: Some, huh?

TS: He did attend some of these meetings because the union leadership would call those members that were the potential (Democrats).

DT: But these were relatively small groups, right?

TS: Oh, small groups. I'm not talking about these mass meetings, you know?

DT: Right. I mean you had to talk in terms, I believe, of maybe five, up to a dozen, . . .

TS: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: . . . something like that.

TS: Not even a dozen.

DT: Yeah.

TS: Mm hmm.

LM: So did you join the Democratic party after Jack's talk?

TS: Yes, I did. You know, I was the lonely voice in Democratic party on Kaua'i, because everybody else belonged to the ILWU. Only, gee, I think there were about five of us that were non-union, but we had a loud voice behind these five. There was Charlie [Charles A.] Rice. Old Charlie, you know how great, big hulk of a man, physically, deep booming voice. The Rice name was big in politics.

LM: And he joined the Democrats also [in 1936].

TS: He was a Democrat. He was a Democrat through all the years.

LM: But the vast majority of the people had been brought into the party from the ILWU.

TS: At that time, yes. Yes.

LM: So the ILWU really had prepared the ground for Burns?

TS: Yes. I would say that when I first got into the party, the first [territorial] convention I attended was at the Kalākaua Intermediate School. And at that [Democratic] convention, there

were only two non-union delegates from Kaua'i. That was Charlie Rice and myself. The rest were all ILWU members.

DT: What year was that, do you recall?

TS: Nineteen—was it '46? [TS is referring to the 1950 convention.]

LM: Yeah.

TS: I'm not too clear now.

DT: It could have been. I think it was, I think, '46 ['50].

TS: And then the following convention was at McKinley High School.

DT: Yeah, okay.

TS: The first one. Because that's when we had that John A—oh, I forgot now. His name was Akau.

DT: Yeah, John Akau.

TS: John Akau. He was a walkout. He was a walkout Democrat.

DT: Okay, that's when you had the split . . .

TS: Mm hmm.

DT: That was really the Heen faction.

TS: Yes.

DT: John Akau was very close to Ernie [Ernest] Heen, [Sr.], really, . . .

TS: Yes.

DT: . . . as opposed to his brother, Bill [William] Heen.

TS: And they had the walk out. (Ernest Kai walked out.) There's when, I'll never forget, (when I first met) Dan [Daniel K.] Inouye, Mike [Michael] Tokunaga, Matsy [Matsuo] Takabuki, the old diehards of the Burns group. They were in there really pitching.

DT: Yeah, Ernie [Ernest] Kai . . .

LM: So they stayed, they stayed.

TS: Yes.

LM: This is at the '48 ['50] convention.

TS: Yes.

LM: They stayed. Why did the others leave?

TS: Because I think the problem was the question of unionism, that came up. You know, those were the days (when) Harry Bridges [of the ILWU] was very, very active, and he made many enemies in the corporate world in Hawai'i. And that was a very sensitive part of the issue of the day.

LM: Why was it sensitive?

TS: Well, you take the Democratic party on the neighbor islands largely influenced by the ILWU insofar as the voting power is concerned, within the party. And yet, there were independents like myself. Matsy Takabuki, Mike Tokunaga, Dan Inouye, you know, all of us were non-union connected individuals. And sometimes, perhaps, with even differing philosophies. And yet, we were merged together in one common interest, to organize a strong political party. Now, John Akau's group were anti-ILWU. So they were introducing resolutions that were causing us to split. And . . .

LM: Why were they against the ILWU?

TS: Well, I think, they were the group that I would refer to as the "Has" or the "Haves." And our group, or the ILWU faction, was the "Have Nots." So I think this is the kind of problems that split the party at the time.

LM: So they were the old-line Democrats? They didn't want to give up power, you mean?

TS: That's right. That's right.

LM: Didn't they use---wasn't communism an issue, too?

TS: It was. It was kind of a veiled issue.

LM: Oh.

TS: It would not come out openly, but it was kind of there, because these were the Joe [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy days.

DT: But really, it was sort of the early McCarthy days . . .

TS: Yes.

DT: . . . when this happened. But I think there was also, I think (Ernest) Heen was also pretty close to another emerging union figure by the name of Art [Arthur A.] Rutledge, right?

TS: Yes.

DT: And they were fairly close. And so there's a little bit of . . .

TS: There's a little bit of . . .

DT: . . . friction between two unions.

TS: Between two unions, that's right.

DT: So the people like Ernie Kai would sort of tie in with Heen.

TS: Yes.

DT: And Sakae Takahashi—I've forgotten which group he was with. Was he . . .

TS: He was . . .

DT: Probably with your group [the standpats] at the time.

TS: He was with us, yes.

DT: At the time.

TS: Yes, at the time he was quite on our side.

LM: So when did the sides going to the party conventions---when did you get actively involved in politics? You joined the party, you went to the conventions.

TS: I joined the party and tried to help organize and bring in independents into the heavily [union] weighted Democratic party. And try to neutralize a little bit more so we'd bring about a better balance. But at that time, you know, I had no idea about running for public office. I was just concerned about what Jack Burns had said to me. By the way, when he was talking to me for over two hours, he's eating my tomatoes. You know, he picks it up from the crates and he would eat tomatoes, you know. I look at him and say, chee, it's my profit going away, you know. But he kept on talking. And this is where I really became convinced of what he was saying. It made sense. In trying to attain certain goals, the methodology he was trying to apply made a lot of sense.

LM: So why did you go for it yourself?

TS: My reason for going into politics, to be an active office seeker, was not motivated by social economics. It was a stupid thing that a young man does from time to time. I was a young man at the time. This was right after the war, you know, few years after the war. During the war there were many constraints, one of which was that there was no more athletic programs in high schools. No more football, no track. They had some basketball, because it was indoors. But the military was very strict about group gatherings. So the three high schools on Kaua'i abandoned football and track. So when the war was over, they were trying to get some of these athletic programs reestablished, one of which was track. At that time, the school program, both capital improvements and the curricular offerings and everything else that were related to school, except the teachers, was county responsibility. So, I approached the school and (was told) we have no way to restore the track in the field. He [the principal] says, "Please go to the board of supervisors," which I did.

I attended one of the—representing Jaycees, of course. And I went to a meeting of the board. Sat through from ten in the morning until about four in the afternoon listening to all these procedures that I had no idea what it was about. Then, at one point, they appropriated \$25,000 to reestablish a horse racetrack at the county fairgrounds. So I thought this is great. So, as naive as I was, I had no—you know, being naive, so naive, I had no idea as to the procedures, and they said, “We’re ready to adjourn this meeting.” And they looked at me and says, “You have something to say?”

I said, “Yes, I have. I’ve been here all day to say something.”

They said, “Go ahead.”

So I made a presentation. I asked them for some funds to restore the race track for the athletic fields (of) the three high schools.

The chairman of the finance committee stands up and says, “I object.” He says, “We don’t have the money.”

Oh I say, “Well, I don’t know what’s more important. Horses or young men and women?”

They say, “Well, we already made a decision.”

I got real upset when they broke up the meeting and (as) they were walking out, and I went up to the chairman of the finance committee (and) said, “You know one of these days, David [Luke], I’m going to run against you, I’m going to beat you.”

He says, “Anytime man, anytime.” He was a Republican, by the way. And I’m a little guy, he’s a great, big guy.

So the following election I had to make good my threat. So I decided to run for office. I didn’t have the foggiest idea what to do. I thought with \$2[00], \$300 I could run a campaign. I was thirty years old, no money. All I had was five Jaycees telling me, “Go man, go,” you know. Chee, it’s easy to stay in the back and push somebody, but you up in the front being pushed, it’s a different story. But that’s how I got (into active politics). I had to make good my threat. But the story goes on to say that we didn’t kick him out of office. But I got elected [in 1948].

LM: So how did you campaign?

TS: I campaigned . . .

LM: Was it a island wide . . .

TS: Yeah, it’s island wide. And I campaigned on issues that were more closely related to the ideals of young men and women. Education, particularly.

LM: And would you just go door to door or speak at rallies or . . .

TS: Door to door. And when I say door to door, I mean door to door. Dog to dog.

LM: I've done it, too. Yeah, I know.

DT: This was 1946 now?

TS: No.

LM: [Nineteen] forty-eight.

TS: This was '48.

DT: [Nineteen] forty-eight? And you were running for board of supervisors of Kaua'i.

TS: Board of supervisors. Uh huh.

DT: Okay.

LM: And so you---were you also doing voter registration to get more people . . .

TS: Yes we did.

LM: . . . in the party?

TS: Yes we did. But I must confess that it was a very lame effort. It was very unscientific. Very disorganized.

DT: Well, lots of the people couldn't vote because they weren't naturalized yet . . .

TS: That's right.

DT: The McCarran Act . . .

TS: That's right.

DT: . . . had not passed. So you didn't have that fertile a field to sign up people.

TS: Very, very difficult. Because, see, you have to understand and appreciate the tremendous influence the sugar plantation management had. The manager of a sugar plantation was god in his community.

LM: So people would follow the way he told them to vote and stuff?

TS: Mm hmm.

LM: All right. So you campaigned door to door, did you have any little rallies or little gatherings?

TS: Oh, yes, we had. Kaua'i was famous for those rallies. Oh, we had good attendance.

LM: So you had to speak before big crowds.

TS: Yes.

LM: Had you ever done that before?

TS: Never. I'll never forget the first time I ever spoke at a rally. We usually begin these rally circuits from the smallest community and then build up to the final, the largest. Well, we started way out in Hanalei and Kīlauea. Kīlauea is a small, little plantation. And we would go into the plantation gymnasium. And there were only about half a dozen people in there, you know. Nobody was interested in politics. Well, I had a speech prepared. All well written out and all, I (had) spent hours working on the speech. And I get up (to) the microphone. And my hands began to shake so much, I couldn't read it. Not that I didn't want to read, I couldn't read because my hands shook so much. So I decided, oh, heck with it. I crumpled up that speech and I started to talk about how I felt about things. It worked! So I decided, hereafter, I will never write another political speech, and I never did it for twenty years.

DT: (Chuckles) You did have problems getting on the plantations proper though, didn't you?

TS: Yes, yes. At first we did. I'll never forget the 1948 campaign. Twice we got evicted from the plantation camps, because we were going house to house. And then I think at that time Jack Burns stepped in. And he approached the management. This was over at Amfac [American Factors]. And he paved the way for us.

DT: That was about the period when Burns was actually running for delegate [to Congress], too.

TS: Yes.

DT: He had a delegate race back in the late [19]40s [in 1948] right?

LM: So you did not force him [David Luke] out of office [in 1948], but you did win a seat, huh?

TS: Second time around [in 1950] we beat him. We got him out.

LM: So in 1948 you got on the council . . .

TS: And then we were still in the minority. The Democrats were in the minority. There were some famous names like [George K.] "Chris" Watase. This was before "Mutt" [Matsuki] Arashiro's time. And we were in the minority, we couldn't do what we wanted. But the second election, we took over the control of the board of supervisors. The three high schools got their race track. (Laughs)

LM: Okay, let's switch tapes here. That's great.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: The following is a continuation of the Serizawa interview. This is videotape number three.

LM: So you were part of the new wave of Democrats?

TS: Yes, yes.

LM: So when did you first run for the house [of representatives]?

TS: In 1952.

LM: How did you decide to do that?

TS: (Coughs) Same kind of reasons.

LM: The party didn't approach you?

TS: No.

LM: No.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

TS: Now what was the question?

LM: How did you decide to run in '52?

TS: Well, again, a foolish young man couldn't get things for the county that he felt the county deserved, because the legislature would not listen. But the legislature was then controlled by Republicans. So I said, "I'll do the same thing I did when I got on the board." So run for office again. So I ran for the house.

DT: And this was still on Kaua'i?

TS: All of these years in Kaua'i, yes.

DT: Till '52, yeah.

LM: So you won your very first time?

TS: Yes.

LM: Who did you beat?

TS: Frankly, I don't recall who I beat, but I think his name was Yutaka Hamamoto. He was a Republican from Kapa'a. He worked for the pineapple company [Hawaiian Canneries Co., Ltd.] as one of the junior executives. (Anthony Brun and Yoshiichi Yoshida also ran for office.)

LM: So when you came in in 1952, the Republicans still controlled the legislature.

TS: And Mr. Hiram Fong was Speaker. Wow, what a Speaker. Great guy, you know.

- DT: And did you have Manuel Henriques, was he there at the time you first got . . .
- TS: Yes.
- DT: . . . elected there?
- TS: Manny Henriques, Billy [William E.] Fernandes, myself, and Toshihara Yama. Kaua'i came in with 100 percent Democrats.
- LM: Wow.
- DT: In '52?
- TS: In '52.
- LM: That's unusual. So were you able to get anything for Kaua'i with a Republican leadership in the house?
- TS: Yes, we did, to some extent (although) I got punished many times by the chairman of the house finance committee, Thomas Sakakihara. He was mean. (DT laughs.)
- LM: When you said "punished," for what?
- TS: Well, because I tried to speak my mind. And when you're a freshman member, and minority especially, you got to be seen but no talk, they say. Oh, he was mean.
- LM: So he would make sarcastic remarks to you, or how would he punish you?
- TS: No. Sarcastic remarks you can live with, but when they take money away from the county, that's hard to take. You see, the practice, the rules of the house or the legislature during that period in the territorial days, was quite different from the existing rules that you find in the legislature today. Today's very, very democratic. Those days it was autocratic. If you were the finance committee chairman, you controlled every single penny that the legislature appropriated. When I say "controlled," I mean really controlled.
- DT: You were shut out of meetings, as I recall, . . .
- TS: Yes.
- DT: . . . in the house.
- TS: Yes.
- DT: And Manuel would pass the time of day playing his ukulele [*'ukulele*], right, in the house? (Chuckles)
- TS: Yes.
- LM: So you probably weren't happy with this. So in '54 you ran again. Was there, by then, a

united Democratic party effort in the election?

TS: Yes, yes. This is the time that Jack [Burns] really rallied the boys together. And many, I think, potential candidates gave up, just in order to present a unified front. In other words, they were not trying to kill each other in the primary. We put our best guys up front. And this is how we took it.

LM: And so, was there---but did the party have much money or other . . .

TS: When did the Democratic party ever have money? (Laughs)

DT: Now.

(Laughter)

LM: So how did so many Democratic candidates win?

TS: I'll tell you. It's a strange thing that you would find it very difficult to understand if you're a more recent politician. In all the elections that I (had) run for office, including when I ran from Hilo, I (had) never had one fundraiser. Never raised public funds by solicitation. Many times, my campaign committee would not allow any one of our people to solicit for funds. Whatever funds that we got outside came voluntarily. We (had) never solicited. This is why 50 percent or more of my campaign expenses came out of my own pocket. It was very difficult. And today, they have how many fundraisers before each election? Four, two a year, or something. It's unbelievable.

LM: So I understand you also helped campaign for the party in general. Weren't you a master of ceremonies?

TS: Yes, I used to do a lot of that.

LM: Where was this? How was it organized?

TS: Well, some of these candidates run for statewide office. We used to have a problem getting someone to speak at the rallies, especially on this island. This island (was) rally famous, at one time anyway. And the distances are great. You go to Kohala on the north end, and you go to Kona on the west end, and south end, Nā'ālehu, and the whole island, including a little place like Kalapana. Now, for instance, Dan Inouye, he couldn't make it, so his campaign coordinator here would ask me. He says, "You're running from Hilo district. Tonight you don't have any rally, can you go to Pāhala and talk for us?" So we drive a hundred miles to Kona, or to Pāhala. And I used to talk for Dan Inouye. Then, other times, I would be an emcee because so many people refused to volunteer their services, so some of us had to do it.

LM: So in '52 you were pretty much alone doing it on your own, and '54 a lot of guys won. What were the '56 and '58 campaigns like? Was the party really strong at that point?

TS: It was. It was very strong, but it began to first show, at least in my mind, a little crack. That disturbed some of us.

LM: What sort of problems started to show?

TS: I think there were some quarters that seemed to begin to feel a little power drunk. They began to show the conflict between existing major labor unions. [Art] Rutledge and [Harry] Bridges (with) Jack Hall.

DT: But, really, things came to a head in the house. Conditions changed a great deal for you in '54 didn't they? Because all of a sudden you had this infusion of Democrats which gave you control of the house and the senate.

TS: But, see, Dan, at that time, those of us who'd been there before, had still control of the senate and the house. Although, there was an infusion of new blood, Democratic blood, into the legislative bodies. They couldn't run away with it so that the breach couldn't broaden, you know, but we were able to hold it together.

DT: But I'm leading up to a very leading question, of course. When [Charles] Kauhane [Speaker of the house] came to grips with particularly the Young Turks, as we would call them, from O'ahu, didn't that leave you in a bit of a bind?

TS: Oh, you (chuckles)—Dan, those were the days he took the (official) clock (on the wall) and put it in the trunk of his car and took it home so we couldn't get the [session] going.

DT: Okay, that's what I'm starting to refer to. I want you to talk about that.

LM: Okay, so. Yeah, all right, what were the problems in the '55 leg[islature], you know?

TS: Well, we came to a parting of ways, (within) the party. At that time (the Democrats were) the majority in the house. The senate had nothing to do with it. But, again, this was the independent Democrats pitted against the ILWU Democrats. And there were certain Democrats who owed their election to the ILWU, because they come from the plantation communities. There were others, independents like myself, who did not rely on or count on the ILWU for their political support. These people began to join each other and finally became two groups. Would you believe it, David Trask [Jr.] was with us? That vociferous person was not with the ILWU. He's the guy that cause(d) (all) the trouble (that started the split).

DT: Trask?

TS: Yeah, David himself.

LM: How did it happen?

TS: Because he got so angry one day. It was a very minor issue in the house. And he got very angry and he was going after—I forgot who the member was, but that particular member, I do recall, was supported by the ILWU. And David was (an independent). And he began going after this one member (in a) house debate (in a vicious manner). And Speaker Kauhane shut him up. He says, "You're out of order. Sit down." David went (on with) his rampage and went wra-wra-wra-wra, you know, (then) he went after the Speaker. The Speaker slammed the gavel, he says, "Recess." And (that) recess was I don't know how many weeks. You're a

historian, Dan, so you probably recall how many weeks we were in recess.

DT: I know you had your problems, and the clock turned up missing for a while. And there was never . . .

TS: Well, it was missing because every day when he went home, the Speaker would tell the sergeant-at-arms (to) take the clock down off the wall, and put it in the trunk of his Cadillac and he'd go home, see. Next day, when he got back, he put the clock back (up) again.

LM: So why would he do that?

TS: Because he didn't want us to stop the (official) clock or get the clock going again. See, the rules of the house and the senate were so different from that of today. You (could) always turn the clock back (to extend the session and) you can extend the legislative session thirty days. We went over thirty days (that session), by merely stopping the clock.

LM: Let me ask one more thing then. How about the program in 1955? Did it suffer or did it get through in spite of this?

TS: In spite of all this, we got it through. Except, we had a Republican governor [Samuel Wilder King]. He vetoed (chuckles) the budget (bill).

LM: What was the program would you say? What were the main parts of the program?

TS: Let me tell you (the) experience I had. In 1955, I was the finance committee chairman. And I always said to myself, "Eh, at least I had one glory." And that was, (that) I was the first Democratic finance committee chairman of the legislature. That's the only distinction I ever had. But when I became chairman, Jack Burns came to see me. He had the same blue serge suit that he's so famous for. Frayed (cuffs), shiny seat. That's Jack Burns. White shirt, necktie. (He came) in. And he says—(I'll) try to imitate the way he approached me. He walks in, you know, straight as a ramrod, you know, he comes in (by saying), "Hey, buddy."

"Hey, Jack."

"Hey, I want to talk to you." You know, captain of the police again the way he talked, you know.

So I said, "Sure."

He says, "I don't care what you guys do here, but there's one thing you gotta do. Give the UH [University of Hawai'i] money."

I say, "Gee, Jack," you know.

"You better give the teachers pay raises, too."

So I said, "Eh, but you realize that if we go with the budget that we have now, we're going to be in deficit spending?"

He says, "I know that. Cut somewhere else, cut somewhere else. But the university and the teachers, you've got to give them." Some of the teachers were looking for a pay raise.

And this had been Jack's philosophy. You've gotta serve the youth because . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is the final tape with Serizawa. Videotape number four.

LM: All right. Could you tell us a little bit about how Charlie Kauhane acted in the '55 legislature?

TS: Well, Charlie, by choice, decided that he was going to carry a one-man campaign to preserve the Hawaiian heritage. When in fact, all of us were very sensitive about the Hawaiian heritage. Particularly the fellows like Dan Inouye, Sparky Matsunaga, they were very sensitive to it. They tried in their own way to do what they felt was the proper thing to do for the Hawaiians. And in the direction--going towards the direction in a proper way that would be more achievable, rather than just raving and ranting. But when we had this great split in the house, I think Charlie lost all sense of balance. And he became, as I would say today, almost racist in his attitude. And (in) some of his rampage from the rostrum as Speaker of the house, he would make these wild speeches, and then he would refer to the legislature as the Diet. Well, perhaps, he didn't (mean to say it). We were all Americans, but there were many, many faces there that could have been member(s) of the Diet if that was in Japan, you know. But, when he used and made such charges, he turned many of us really off. Because as I described to you earlier, when I (gave up) my dual citizenship, my father had told me, "You're American, you think like American, you act like American. So you should be American citizen and only American citizen." Well, this is the attitude all of us had: Masato Doi, Sparky [Matsunaga], Dan [Inouye], all of us. And to be accused that we were still Japanese hurt us very deeply. And I think the one who hurt most was Sparky, because Sparky, as you probably know him, is a very strong-minded person. And he made himself known to Speaker Kauhane that he was American and more American than Charlie himself. That's the way he put it. "I'm more American than you."

LM: So would he, for instance, cite his war record or something?

TS: No.

LM: No.

TS: No. He didn't cite anything like that.

DT: Mentioning Sparky, I remember Sparky made his speech where he said he was going to give up politics because of what had happened . . .

TS: Yes.

DT: . . . in that '55 session.

LM: So besides these racist accusations, okay, you said the governor vetoed some of it, the Speaker acted badly. Nevertheless, the program as a whole got through.

TS: Yes, it did get through.

LM: You mentioned education. What were the other parts of the program would you say?

TS: Well, the university. And then we began nibbling away at what we would later label it as land reform. We began chiseling away bit by bit.

LM: How about taxes?

TS: Real property tax. Yes.

LM: Real property. Okay. Now, when this stuff went to the governor [Samuel Wilder King], what happened?

TS: Well, the governor vetoed the budget. And sure, we had to have another session. And finally recall(ed) us for a special session (and we overrode) the veto.

LM: You did override.

TS: We overrode the veto.

DT: He also vetoed about forty other bills, didn't he?

TS: That's right.

LM: So the program eventually did pass over the governor's veto.

TS: Yes. The teachers got their raise.

LM: And what happened---how would you, in the next two, you were in two more sessions . . .

TS: Well, in 1956, I came to Hilo. So after my term expired, I stayed out of elective office. I became a party worker then. These [were] the days, Dan, when I was really going on the stump on behalf of the party.

DT: And by this time you were with the [Hawaiian] Airlines, were you not?

TS: Yes, yes.

DT: When did you join the airlines?

TS: I joined them in '48 or '49.

DT: We should have picked that up earlier, but at any rate.

LM: And how about---so you were still in the legislature, though, the '56 . . .

TS: I was still legally a member of the legislature.

LM: So did more of the program get passed in that session?

TS: Yes, they kept chiseling away at land reform.

LM: And was Mr. Kauhane still Speaker?

TS: No.

LM: Who was Speaker in that session?

TS: Elmer Cravalho, no, not Elmer. Yeah, Elmer Cravalho. [No, Speaker was O. Vincent Esposito.]

LM: So chipping away at land reform, what else would you say was important that happened in that session?

TS: I think a lot of the labor laws were amended. And some of them were drastic amendments, yes. More liberal. Okay. Your workers' compensation, for example. Very liberal.

LM: Can we back up a bit? Didn't you go to the 1950 con-con [constitutional convention] also?

TS: Yes.

LM: How did you come to---why did you run for that? How did it go? Was it . . .

TS: Well, to me, again. . . . You see, again, you must understand that I was a young man yet. We do rash things when you're young. I felt that if I wanted to really, truly serve my constituents, that I must get down to the basics. Which means that I have to put a lot of my own time, sacrifice some of my time. My wife and I discussed these things, you know, because I can't do it unilaterally. And even at that time, we were already talking about statehood. And there were subcommittees from Congress sent down to Hawai'i, I guess just going through the motions and holding hearings. And since I was already in (an) elective office, I was extremely interested in statehood. And again, Jack Burns had a great influence talking to me about statehood. So I decided that if this con-con was the first statehood con-con, then I better try to get in there and put my stamp on it, too, so that some of the things I believe in could be translated into constitutional law.

LM: What things did you want to get into the constitution?

TS: I wanted, what you call, home rule, because I'd been in the county government. And recognizing the deficiencies. And I had reason for running for the con-con. I wanted to translate and manifest my thinking into (our) constitution. That was my primary reason for running.

LM: What were the attractions of statehood? Why was statehood good? What did Jack say? What did you feel about it?

TS: Well, Jack said that in getting statehood, what it means to Hawai'i, is that it's going to open up a lot of doors for our young people. And he says a simple thing like college tuition. If we

can, (become) a state, we have a better voice with other universities, because we are not a territory university anymore. He says as long as we're a territory [they will] still think Hawai'i is a foreign country, but we want to make them understand Hawai'i (is an integral part of the United States of America). If we're a state, then we can have this established, the agreement with the other universities so that (there will be) better (opportunities) for our young people to get into Mainland colleges. He says these are very small, almost insignificant things, but it's these little things that makes the difference. And I believed him. He talked about, of course, obviously the (bigger) voice in Congress. So, I felt it was extremely important we do something at the time. This was back in 1950.

DT: You got your home rule in 1957, as a member of the legislature, isn't that right?

TS: Mm hmm. Took a long time.

(Laughter)

LM: When you were working as a party worker, could you describe how the party was organized in those days? I mean, did you choose slates of candidates? Did you have party-wide fundraisers, or is that in the future stuff?

TS: That's future. Yes.

LM: So how did you folks operate?

TS: We operated on a shoestring. Number one. We had really no funds to speak of. In the early days, back in the [19]50s, early [19]50s, the party really didn't have any money at all. It's (through) the generosity of people like Charlie Rice, who was very wealthy then. He would make contributions to the party. And you know, \$1,000, \$2,000. And (few other) individuals from time to time would make contributions like that. But, even when we organized the first Democratic party on Kaua'i, as I recall, being comprised largely of union members whose incomes were [at a] very low level, that they couldn't afford membership dues. So we had no such things as membership dues. No initiation dues, nothing at all. You just bring yourself to the party meeting.

LM: How about choosing candidates? Did the party have any effect . . .

TS: No, no, absolutely not.

LM: How were the candidates chosen?

TS: They were not chosen. Everyone that wanted to run for office would just say, "I want to be a Democrat and run for office." And we sign 'em up.

LM: And was it that way, say, when you were here [in Hilo] in the later [19]50s also?

TS: Yes, yes, yes.

LM: So we've heard stories about, for instance, Bob [Robert C.] Oshiro [state Democratic party chairman, 1962-68] making a big chart showing who would run for what, when, and stuff

like that.

TS: That, Bob's time, is more contemporary. You see, Bob was not in politics that early. Bob came much later.

LM: So you're saying, how long---so through the late [19]50s and in the early [19]60s it was still like this? People just ran openly?

TS: Yes.

LM: The party was still broke?

TS: The party didn't really have strength.

DT: So you retired from the legislature in what year?

TS: In 1970.

DT: Nineteen seventy. So you continued on through the period of the New Hawai'i program which Elmer [Cravalho] sort of sparked. In other words, it was you in the house . . .

TS: Yes, very much. I was very much. Yes. We, Elmer, myself, Stanley Hara, David Trask, Masato Doi, Dan Inouye. I think Nadao Yoshinaga was in that, no, no, Nadao was not in the group. I think a couple more fellows. I can't remember the names. We sat around with---kicked around Elmer's idea of a new Hawai'i. You know, one thing I must say in passing, that Elmer was a brilliant strategist. Charlie Kauhane was a great Speaker because he was autocratic. Elmer was a great Speaker, even greater than Hiram Fong. He was not (only) autocratic, he was everything. You name it, everything that you can say about meanness, that's Elmer Cravalho. But, he, to me, was the greatest strategist that I have known.

LM: What was the New Hawai'i program?

TS: New Hawai'i program was to try to develop the kind of society we want (since we were now) a state. Everything we did in building a new Hawai'i was geared to statehood. This was our motive. The biggest item on (program) that was land reform. That was the biggest thing.

DT: Yeah, well, this really came to a head, didn't it, right after Burns got elected [governor] and he really didn't have any clear set plans. So it was you folk in the house who really gave direction to . . .

TS: We helped him, because, you see, when Jack got elected governor [in 1962], he had many problems to overcome. Because the corporate society in Hawai'i was very fearful of him, because they figure, well, here's where the ILWU is going to take over the state. We knew otherwise. We felt that as a single person, Jack Burns would not be able to accomplish the goals that we were looking for. And the only way for us (was) to take hold of the government and carry it from there on. Let the glory be the governor's glory. We're not looking for glory, but we wanted to build something that the state would allow us to carry through.

LM: So land reform and. . . .

TS: Land reform, tax reform. You see, this whole idea emerged back in 1955. Kept chipping away a little bit at a time until we got a Democratic governor that we can push through our ideas. Now Jack was very cooperative.

DT: Yeah—go ahead.

LM: Could you be specific what you meant by land reform and tax reform?

TS: Well, the land use law, for example. You see, back in those days, you had the Big Five controlling most of the land. Bishop Estate, Campbell Estate, those are the big ones. They (would) not open up lands (in fee). And we felt that there has to be more landownership, small parcels, by many people. And the only way you're going to open it up, is you have to force them to open up. That means you're going to (have to) tax them (more equitably). If they want to live in a refrigerator, they pay a tax. If they don't want to (pay the tax, then) take it out of the refrigerator. This is the concept. Simple. So we said we (are) going into land use (concept). And we did that, develop the highest and best use (method), which really controls the tax. If you let land (stay bare then) highest use is the basis upon which you develop your assessment.

LM: So what was the idea? To force them?

TS: Force them.

LM: To force them to do what?

TS: To open up lands. To put it to productive use, rather than leaving it in the refrigerator. Now, I think the situation has been reversed. I have been talking about repealing the land use law. Some people go green when they hear me say that (but I believe) the need for it is gone.

DT: Let me push this along a little bit. Even after you retired from the legislature in 1970, you remained somewhat active in politics. I believe you did participate in a Kaua'i campaign and you went back to Kaua'i in recent years to . . .

TS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. To get Tony elected. (Chuckles)

DT: Okay, Tony Kunimura. All right, you went back to . . . And it was successful, right?

TS: Yeah. I—you know what I did? It was funny. People there that used to campaign for me, you know, good friends of mine, my original campaign committee, (chuckles) I began (rounding) them all up again. Take them out of the mothballs, you know, some of them coming up with crutches. But, you know, they did a good job. They did a good job. We had a lot of fun.

DT: So you sort of—you're still active, I gather, in little ways, here and there.

TS: Uh, presently?

DT: Just like on Kaua'i with . . .

TS: No.

DT: Not this last election for Tony [for mayor], but the one before that you were successful.

TS: Yeah, I got involved—oh, yeah, I got involved in that one.

DT: This last one you did?

TS: No, the one before it.

DT: The one that he won. The last one he won.

TS: Yeah.

LM: Let me ask you one quick one. It has to be short, we're running out of tape. What do you think is the biggest problem now in Hawai'i politics?

TS: Lack of discipline. Lack of teamwork. Too many individualistic members of the party. I think this is a major problem. Government is not an individual game. It's a collective effort. But there are too many of them, I believe, that do not recognize that you have to do things collectively. Because society is made that way. Government is that. But there are too many individuals (unwilling to compromise).

DT: Well it's nice to see you're still so active at, I believe, seventy-three years of age here working hard every day at the Naniloa Hotel.

TS: Never worked so hard in my life before.

DT: Which may explain some of the noise of all the renovation you're doing here on our tapes. We thank you very much.

TS: Oh, you're welcome. Dan, it's been a real pleasure, it's fun.

LM: It's fascinating, it's fascinating.

TS: It's fun talking about the past.

END OF INTERVIEW

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POLITICAL HISTORY
DOCUMENTATION PROJECT**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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